

# DDC Works to Improve Safety and Increase Readiness

By Jessica Walter-Groft, DDC Command Affairs



*DDSP's Brandon Smith works safely by securing the seatbelt on the forklift.*

The Defense Distribution Center (DDC) is always looking for ways to better support the Warfighter and to provide the highest quality customer service possible. To do this, the DDC workforce has to be able to perform at an optimal level, so DDC Commander Kathleen M. Gainey, USA, has made safety a DDC priority. "Safe and healthy employees are an essential element of a productive workforce and I intend to provide the support necessary to improve safety performance throughout the DDC."

In May 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld began a department-wide accident reduction effort. He challenged all Department of Defense (DoD) leaders to reduce the number of accidents and mishaps by at least 50 percent in the next two years. "These goals are achievable, and will directly increase our operational readiness. We owe no less to the men and women who defend our nation," said Secretary Rumsfeld.

Safety Officials at DDC are striving to reduce the rate of accidents resulting in lost workdays from 3.2 to 1.6 (per 100 employees) by September 2005. Lost workdays are a combination of Continuation of Pay and Leave Without Pay that is taken because of work-related accidents. The majority of injuries that result in lost workdays are back and hand injuries, strains and sprains.

To reduce the number of injuries, and subsequently the number of lost days, DDC will implement the Depot Safety Action Plan 2004 and regularly monitor

the plan's progress. "The Depot Safety Action Plan 2004 focuses on determining the root cause of repeated accidents and improving communication all along the way—from accident prevention to returning injured employees to work. The plan is also designed to promote employee participation and to provide wellness and safety resources to the depot employees," described Dave Mack, DDC Safety Manager.

DDC and DLA will also be instituting measures to bring employees back to work quickly. One of these new measures is the DLA Injury Compensation Center (ICC). The goal of the ICC is to ensure that injured employees obtain the benefits they are entitled to and to get the employees back to work in some sort of limited or light duty capacity as soon as they are medically capable. To do this, the ICC is involved in the process very soon after



*Frank Barclay of DDSP uses a safe lifting technique to remove a box from a pallet.*

the injury occurs. From that point, the ICC is actively involved in the injured employee's case—communicating with the supervisors, employees, Safety Officials and physicians involved. "We feel that by making sure that all parties involved are well-informed assists in the recovery and return to work of our employees," said Donna Estep,

Injury Compensation Program Administrator.

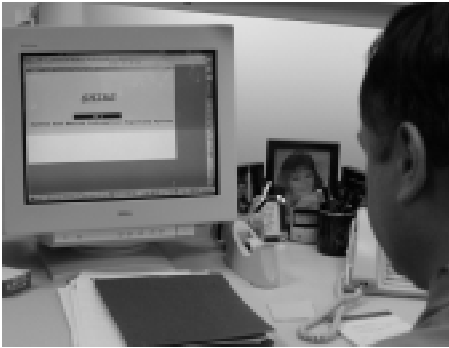
With a workforce at an average age of 49 performing physically demanding tasks, DDC's distribution centers have been plagued by a high number of on-the-job injuries, but none more so than



*Steve Harper places labels on boxes in the Light Packing area of DDSP. Some employees who are injured but available for light duty may also be assigned to this division.*

Defense Distribution Depot San Joaquin, Calif. (DDJC). Because of this, DDJC has formed a Case Management Team that analyzes each incident to determine how the accident can be prevented in the future and how they can get the employee back to work as soon as possible. "Although the workforce may be older, on average, than one you would find doing a similar job in the private sector, the depot employees are very knowledgeable about the job they do and that is vital to our mission," said Mack. For those employees who are injured on the job, the DDJC Case Management Team can usually find a modified or light duty job for them to do until their medical restrictions are lifted and they are ready to go back to their original position. Mack thinks this is a smart idea. "That way the employee is getting back to work and being productive."

And the depot's production rate doesn't seem to be the only advantage for getting an injured employee back to work sooner—it benefits the employee as well. "After an injury or illness, an employee's most effective route back to



***DDC Safety Manager Dave Mack accesses the Safety and Health Information Reporting System (SHIRS) for the most current information on work-related mishaps.***

good health is to return to a normal life and a satisfying work routine," according to the Federal Occupational Health's (FOH) Return to Work Program. FOH says that those who return to work as soon as medically capable are generally more satisfied with their recovery process.

The fastest way to begin the process of getting an injured employee on the road to recovery, and to prevent future injuries from occurring, is to report the incident as soon as possible. So DDC has established a new goal to report any accident that may result in lost time within 24 hours. "Not only will this move the process along at a higher rate, returning the employee to work as soon as possible, but our hope is that this early time frame will give us the opportunity to conduct a thorough investigation," said Mack. Recording specific and accurate information is crucial to the investigation,

so Safety Officials want to know exactly where the incident occurred, why it occurred and what the employee was doing at the time so they can determine how future accidents can be prevented.

DDC is also using a new website and the Safety and Health Information Reporting System (SHIRS) to report work-related accidents. By making information on the incidents readily available, Safety Officials are able to prioritize their efforts according to the installations needing the most attention.



***Mark Romanoski of DDSP Places Chains along a truck pit to guard against falls.***

Another tool used to measure the safety climate at DDC installations is a report compiled by EA, an environmental solutions firm hired by DDC to evaluate the safety programs at DDC's distribution centers. The report, presented to DDC in September 2003, indicated an overall improvement of the Safety Programs, but still identified hazards in areas such as fall protection, electrical, storage racks, dock operations,

machine guarding, housekeeping, material storage and fire protection. To eliminate the hazards found, each will be assigned a Risk Assessment Code to show its priority, then the progress of each will be tracked by Safety Officials until the hazard is eradicated.

Although Safety Officials are watching the Safety Program closely and looking for ways to prevent injury, the most important component in the workplace safety program is the distribution center employee. "Employee involvement in the Safety Plan is critical," said Mack. Taking shortcuts like removing safety guards on equipment or not using personal protective



***DDSP's Kenneth Long is protected by a lanyard and a harness while picking items in the high-rise area.***

equipment (PPE) can lead to serious injury, so Mack encourages all employees to pay attention and challenge each other to work safely.

Another important component to preventing work-related accidents is communication. "If you see a hazard, report it to your supervisor right away," said Mack. "We want to do all we can to keep our employees healthy and at work, being productive, so we are better able to be at the ready in support of the Warfighter – our ultimate goal."

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WORKPLACE SAFETY PROGRAM IS  
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